

Message Text

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43

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: BENN PREPARES FOR LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE

SUMMARY - ENERGY SECRETARY BENN WAS BACK IN THE NEWS
SEPTEMBER 8 WITH PUBLICATION OF HIS LETTER TO CONSTITU-
ENTS URGING THAT THE GOVERNMENT RAPIDLY IMPLEMENT A
"MAJOR PROGRAM OF SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL REFORM" TO OVER-
COME CURRENT ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS. BENN'S
ACTION REPRESENTS AN OVERT ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT AND
A CLEAR BID FOR LEADERSHIP OF LEFT-WING FORCES AT THE
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LABOR PARTY'S FORTHCOMING ANNUAL CONFERENCE WHICH ALREADY

PROMISED TO BE A CLASSIC RENEWAL OF RIGHT/LEFT STRUGGLE THAT HAS TRADITIONALLY CHARACTERIZED THESE EVENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER NEARLY THREE MONTHS OF RELATIVE SILENCE AND OBSCURITY, ENERGY SECRETARY TONY BONN RELEASED TO MEDIA A LETTER WRITTEN FOR HIS BRISTOL CONSTITUENTS WHICH CONTAINS OVERT, IF IMPLICIT, CHALLENGE TO WILSON GOVERNMENT AND ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES. NOTING THAT BRITAIN'S TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM HAS FAILED, BENN ARGUED THAT CURRENT ECONOMIC SLUMP AND RISING UNEMPLOYMENT CAN ONLY BE ELIMINATED BY FAR-REACHING SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL REFORMS ALONG THE LINES DESCRIBED IN PARTY'S ELECTION MANIFESTO. GIVEN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, HE SAID, GOVERNMENT "MUST USE THE CRISIS WE HAVE INHERITED AS THE OCCASION FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE. NOT THE EXCUSE FOR POSTPONING IT."

2. IN OTHER PORTIONS OF THE LETTER, WHICH ARE CERTAIN TO PROVOKE SERIOUS CONTROVERSY, HE URGED THAT LINKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, THE OARTY AND THE TRADES UNIONS BE STRENGTHENED, AND ATTACKED THE MEDIA FOR ITS ANTI-LABOR BIAS WHICH, HE ALLEGED, "HAS NOW REACHED SUCH PROPORTIONS AS TO MAKE THE ENTIRE MATTER A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE." HE DENIED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WISHED TO SEE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS IMPOSED ON THE MEDIA. BENN DID NOT LOSE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STRIKE OUT ON THE EC ISSUE, CAUTIONING HIS CONSTITUENTS TO BE ALERT TO ACTIONS OF "SUPRANATIONAL COMMON MARKET INSTITUTIONS THAT MIGHT WEAKEN THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL THE BRITISH OEOPLE CAN EXERT OVER THEIR OWN ELECTED PARLIAMENT.'

3. COMMENT - THE BENN LETTER WAS CAREFULLY DRAFTED TO AVOID ANY EIRECT CRITICISM OF THE WILSON GOVERNMENT OR ITS POLICIES, BUT AS BENN IS HIGHLY SKILLED AT THE ART OF INDIRECTION, THERE IS NO DOUBT AS TO HIS TARGET. WHILE IT WILL SURELY PROVOKE A STRONG REACTION FROM HIS CABINET COLLEAGES, ESPECIALLY CHANCELLOR HEALEY, WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY ATTEMPT TO DISCIPLINE HIM. THE LETTER WAS ALSO A SKILLFUL APPEAL TO THE BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS OF BENN'S LARGER CONSTITUENCY, THE PARTY'S LEFT-WING, AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MUST BE VIEWED AS A CLEAR BID FOR LEADERSHIP OF LEFTIST DISSIDENTS AT THE UPCOMING ANNUAL LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE (SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 3). THE THEME OF THIS LETTER ECHOES A SPEECH BENN MADE AT THE 1973 CONFERENCE -- WHICH MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE WAS HIS MOST EFFECTIVE AND ONE OF THE BEST AT ANY OARTY CONFERENCE -- IN WHICH HE ARGUED THAT THE PARTY SHOULD REGARD PERIODS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PUSH SOCIALISM RATHER THAN A JUSTI-

FICATION FOR DELAY. AND USE THEM TO CARRY OUT MAJOR
STRUCTURAL REFORMS. THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE, ON WHICH WE
WILL BE REPORTING IN GREATER DETAIL, WAS ALREADY SHAPING
UP TO BE AN ESPECIALLY VIGOROUS RENEWAL OF THE CONTINUING
POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE LEFT- AND RIGHT-WINGS OF THE
PARTY. WITH BENN DETERMINED TO LEAD THE LEFT, AS NOW
SEEMS EVIDENT, IT COULD BE A CLASSIC DONNYBROOK.

RICHARDSON

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